

SENATE BILL 1216

By Norris

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49,
Chapter 4, Part 10, relative to tuition assistance for
members of the Tennessee national guard.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-1001, is amended by deleting the section in its entirety and substituting instead the following language:

This part shall be known and may be cited as the "Tennessee Support, Training, and Renewing Opportunity for National Guardsmen (STRONG) Act of 2017."

SECTION 2. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-1003, is amended by deleting subdivision (1) in its entirety and substituting instead the following language:

"Educational institution" means any public university, college, or community college or any private college or university that is regionally accredited and has its primary campus domiciled in this state;

SECTION 3. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-1003, is further amended by adding the following language as new, appropriately designated subdivisions:

() "Federal tuition assistance" means federal military tuition assistance other than Montgomery GI Bill benefits and Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits;

() "Full-time student" means a student attending an educational institution and enrolled in at least twelve (12) semester hours during each semester of attendance toward a first bachelor's degree;

() "Semester" means a fall, spring, or summer semester at an educational institution, if the educational institution is on a semester system, or the equivalent, if the educational institution is on a system other than a semester system;

() "Course completion" means the last day of instruction for the period or semester as determined by the student's educational institution;

SECTION 4. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-1004, is amended by deleting the section in its entirety and substituting instead the following language:

(a) The Tennessee Support, Training, and Renewing Opportunity for National Guardsmen (STRONG) program, referred to as the "program," shall be established under the authority of the adjutant general to provide tuition reimbursement to an educational institution on behalf of eligible members of the Tennessee national guard. Member eligibility for the program shall be determined pursuant to § 49-4-1005.

(b) Upon successful application by the eligible member attending a public educational institution, the department of military shall pay the educational institution an amount equal to one hundred percent (100%) of the maximum resident undergraduate in-state tuition charged by the institution attended, less all other state or federal financial assistance as described in § 49-4-1005. Such financial assistance must be credited first to the member's tuition, subject to § 49-4-1005.

(c) Notwithstanding subsection (b), for members attending a private two-year college the amount paid is the average cost of tuition at the public two-year postsecondary institutions, as determined by the Tennessee higher education commission and Tennessee student assistance corporation, less all other financial assistance received by the member. For members attending a private four-year college or university the amount paid is the average cost of tuition at the public four-year universities, as determined by the Tennessee higher education commission and Tennessee student assistance corporation, less all other financial assistance received by the member. Such financial assistance must be credited first to the amount of the average tuition, subject to § 49-4-1005.

(d) The adjutant general is authorized to promulgate rules, in accordance with the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act, compiled in title 4, chapter 5, to effectuate the purposes of the program.

SECTION 5. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-1005, is amended by deleting the section in its entirety and substituting instead the following language:

The following are limitations and conditions on eligibility for tuition reimbursement under the program:

(1) A member shall maintain satisfactory academic progress and a minimum grade point average of 2.0 as determined by the educational institution attended for the semester for which the member applies for tuition reimbursement;

(2) A member receiving tuition reimbursement under this part who ceases to be eligible for the reimbursement because the member fails to maintain satisfactory academic progress or the required grade point average at the end of any semester may regain eligibility for tuition reimbursement at the end of any subsequent semester in which satisfactory academic progress and the required grade point average are established;

(3) Tuition reimbursement must be paid to an educational institution on behalf of a member for no more than one hundred twenty (120) credit hours or eight (8) full-time equivalent semesters toward a member's first bachelor's degree. A member shall cease to be eligible for tuition reimbursement under this part upon the first of the following events to occur:

(A) The member has attempted one hundred twenty (120) credit hours, inclusive of any postsecondary credit hours earned prior to receipt of tuition reimbursement under this part;

(B) The member has completed eight (8) full-time equivalent semesters; or

(C) The member has earned a first bachelor's degree;

(4) Tuition reimbursement amounts that a member is eligible to receive under this part must be offset and reduced by the aggregate amount of state and federal education financial assistance received by the member during the semester or educational term, including, but not limited to, the Tennessee Promise scholarship, the Tennessee Reconnect grant, the Tennessee HOPE scholarship, and similar state assistance, as such assistance programs or grants may be amended, as well as Tennessee student assistance awards, the federal Pell grant, Montgomery GI Bill benefits, Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, and federal tuition assistance program benefits;

(5) Members eligible for federal tuition assistance shall apply for and use federal tuition assistance;

(6) Members shall be in good standing and currently active in the Tennessee national guard; and

(7) Members shall submit an application for tuition reimbursement under this part within ninety (90) days of course completion.

SECTION 6. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 4, Part 10, is amended by adding the following language as a new section:

49-4-1007.

On or before December 1, 2018, and on or before December 1 of each subsequent year this program is in effect, the adjutant general of Tennessee shall provide annual student-level participant data to the Tennessee higher education commission for publication.

SECTION 7. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 4, Part 10, is further amended by adding the following language as a new section:

49-4-1008.

This part is repealed on June 30, 2021, unless reenacted or extended by the general assembly prior to that date.

SECTION 8. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.